

Aborigines-Migrant Settlers Crisis and Reconstruction Efforts in two Yoruba Communities in South Western Nigeria

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Abstract

Communities coexist for several reasons. Many traditional Yoruba communities are not an exemption as quite a number of communities were brought together partially based on the need to fight against a common enemy as well as prevent invasion. Ile-Ife and Modakeke-Ife are two neighbouring communities demonstrating such historical background. The communities have co-existed peacefully for several decades, shared many things in common including cases of intermarriages until they started having communal clashes. The crisis have caused significant changes to the existing social relations between the two communities, resulting in widespread breakdown of law and order, destruction of lives and properties as well as homelessness and dispossession of farmlands. Despite the intensity of the crisis and the overwhelming odds, the communities have remained as neighbours. What are the sources of the communities' resilience amidst the disaster? Forty Seven in-depth interviews were held with two groups of adults (youths and the elderly) on gender basis who are residents in the two communities. Findings revealed that informal social network and some formal community institutions were the most significant factors enhancing participants' resilience during and after the crisis. However, the study also disturbingly revealed that there is still bitterness centring on farm land rights within the community, and partisan politics have undermined previous efforts at addressing the issue. The study concludes that disrupted social networks could erode community cohesion and political factors have the potential to further diminish resilience against crisis in the future.

Introduction

Ile-Ife an ancient Yoruba town is the cradle of the Yoruba race. The people of Ile-Ife are believed to be the aborigines while the Modakeke-Ifes are migrants. The age and the origin of Ile-Ife are shrouded in mystery that has not been solved (Agbe, 2001). History shows that Modakeke-Ife people migrated to settle down in the area they are today during the collapse of Old Oyo Empire in the 19th century (Johnson, 1921) which caused a flood of refugees down south. For several years, both communities coexisted peacefully. They shared a lot of things in common as members from both communities have intermarried, partnered in business and belong to the same Yoruba race. All these interactions, among other factors, have fused both communities together in several ways.

The peaceful coexistence of Ile-Ife and Modakeke-Ife people turned sour mainly for historical and economic reasons and which later politicized to cause crisis. Starting from the first crisis that started between 1835 and 1849 and the recent one of between

2000 and 2001, these factors have remained relevant in the history of the crisis as well as the reconciliatory efforts that produced the current relatively peaceful situation. See Oladoyin (2001 for details). The communal clashes have caused significant changes to the social relations between the two communities. Despite the intensity of the crisis and the overwhelming odds, both communities have remained as neighbours.

The coexistence of both communities especially in their early days of interaction should not be taken as an absolute conflict free periods. Conflicts are inevitable in any social grouping or social interaction. Conflict could be functional or dysfunctional. The inevitability of conflict in any social interaction thus makes it a necessity that should be properly managed since it could be of positive or negative effects on the society. The usual negative nature of conflicts in human society makes it a man-made disaster. Hence, in our subsequent discussions in this chapter, we would be equating communal clashes as man-made disaster which separates it from natural disasters. Although in typology both disasters are different in orientation and dimensions, but their effects on humanity are enormous and could negatively affect the gracious coexistence of community members. Hazards and disasters are a major problem world wide (Peek & Mileti, 2002). While natural disaster has been on increase in many parts of the world especially in this millennium (Ronan, & Johnston, 2005); terrorism and technologically induced disasters have also been on the increase. Both natural and manufactured disasters have physical and social consequences. It is worthy to note that both consequences can be daunting on the individuals as well as the community as a whole. However, minimising the consequences will be dependent on factors like the resilience obtainable among members of the affected community or locality. Studies on the Ife-Modakeke crisis have so far provided historical explanations for the crisis, factors (remote and immediate) that fuelled the crisis as well as steps taken so far by the legal steps taken by both communities to resolve the crisis (Agbe, 2001; Toriola, 2001; Oladoyin, 2001). Little attention has been paid to the communities' resilience during the crisis and in the post war reconstruction efforts. For our discussion in this chapter, resilience is conceived as the capability of a system to withstand or absorb change while maintaining its structure, function and identity, and feedbacks (Walker et al. 2004). At the individual experiences, resilience refers to the ability to successfully adapt to change and stressful events in healthy and constructive ways (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan et al., 2002a; Garmezy, 1991). Resilience is dynamic and not static. It only projects the ability to recover from negative events and not the vulnerability to stress like events (Rutter, 1985, 1999; Garmezy, 1991). Hence, the major foci of this chapter are to examine the factors that could be responsible for the communities' resilience. Other similar issues that will be addressed are how prepared were they for the disaster and their post war reconstruction efforts.

Description of Ile-Ife and Modakeke-Ife communities.

Ile-Ife and Modakeke-Ife communities are located on Longitude 4.6 and Latitude 7.5N. The two neighbouring communities are in Osun State, south western Nigeria. No clear boundary demarcation exists between both communities especially to an outsider. Agriculture is the main stay of the local economy. The major occupation being agriculture has contributed to the critical role farm land has occupied in the long

history of the crisis between both communities. There are orthodox and non-orthodox health service providers in the communities. There are private and public orthodox health service providers serving both communities. Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals (public) and the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital (Private) are the largest hospitals in the locality. There are quite a number of traditional medicine practitioners in the communities that perform different functions including caring for the sick and providing spiritual solutions to other life challenges. Religion is also an important aspect of life in the communities. Christianity, Islam and traditional religions are the three major religions in the locality. There are local shrines and deities in both communities. Ile-Ife is also known for her position as the custodian of the Yoruba traditional religion. As a way of cultural preservation and meeting other cultural needs, specific traditional festivals are usually celebrated at specific periods. The Olojo is one of the annual traditional festivals celebrated in Ile-Ife town. Olojo, which literally means “the owner of the day,” is a day set aside to celebrate creation and make offerings to the creator in thankfulness. Out of the 365 days in a normal year, there are about four to five days a year that sacrifices are not offered to deities in Ile-Ife (Fabunmi, 1985). The Modakekes also have traditional festivals that are celebrated within specific periods. Both communities serve as links to other towns in the neighbouring states in South Western Nigeria.

Methods

At the beginning, the Researchers prepared a one-page written description of the research objectives and discussed it through face-to-face visits with some community elders, women leaders, and youth leaders, and the non-governmental organisations providing services within the communities. This qualitative study entailed the use of key informants interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to generate data and insights on resilience as conceived by members of the two communities through a planned discussion in a convenient place chosen by the participants. FGDs have been increasingly used in social investigations to obtain preliminary findings where limited information is available. In focus groups, the community members become the teacher, while the researcher learns from their experiences. FGDs have been used to gain access to various aspects of people’s life (Morgan, 1988; Krueger, 1988; Ruff & Alexander, 2005).

Field interviews were held with residents that are indigenes in the affected areas. Through the assistance of the youth leaders and the elders of the communities’ qualitative key-informant interviews were conducted with some affected individuals. These consist of widows, business operators who lost their businesses to the crisis, farmers whose farms were affected and those who suffered permanent or partial incapability due to the crisis. Additional key informant interviews were held with two field officers in two of the non-governmental organisations providing services in both communities. Before the interviews, the research objectives were explained to each informant and consent obtained. A total of forty-seven key informant interviews were held with the above categories of individuals at locations chosen by the key informants. Each interview lasted for a minimum of thirty minutes. An audio tape recorder was used in recording the interview. This was also done with the consent

of the informant. All the informants were allowed to ask questions on the project in order to clear any misconception. The interviews were conducted in both English and Yoruba languages depending on the informant preferred language.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with youths (18-35) and the adults (36years and above) on gender basis. A minimum of 8 and maximum of 11 participants per group were recorded in all the FGD sessions in both communities. A total of 86 individuals participated in the FGDs, while a total of 8 FGD sessions were held in both communities. An audio tape recorder was used in recording the discussion and a note taker also took some notes. All the participants were briefed on the research objectives by the moderator and they were also encouraged to ask questions in case not satisfied with the explanations. The FGDs were conducted in Yoruba language the indigenous language of the participants. Only the indigenes were included and the key informants facilitated the recruitment of participants that met the inclusion criteria. The study period was from February 2007 to August 2008.

Data Analysis

Only qualitative methods were adopted due to the research objectives. The recorded tapes were listened to frequently and repeatedly read through the verbatim transcripts. Data from the key informant interviews and FGD were transcribed and themes and sub-categories were noted as they emerged from the analysis. All the interviews conducted in Yoruba were moderated by the first author. Transcription of data was initially done in Yoruba language and later translated to English language by both authors. Both the Yoruba and English transcriptions and translations were later given to an expert in both languages to ensure proper and accurate translation. While data from each of the focus groups were analyzed separately, no significant differences emerged among the eight groups with respect to thematic content. Hence, the findings are therefore presented as a summary of all groups.

Discussion of findings

A total of 86 individuals participated in 8 focus groups: 49 females and 37 males in both communities. For the in-depth interviews, 47 informants were recruited. Out of this number, 45 individuals: 18 males and 27 females were affected indigenes currently residing in the communities. Only 2 key informants were not indigenes but who are operating non-governmental organisations in the locality.

The findings of the study revealed similarities in the resilience of members of both communities. Despite the similarities, emerging evidence portrays the influence of the Yoruba cultural belief system on the various efforts taken during the war, reconciliation period as well as the post crisis reconstruction efforts.

Table 1:Sociodemographic Characteristics Of Participants

Characteristics	%	(n)
Gender		
Male	44.9	(57)
Female	55.1	(70)
Age range(years)		
18-25	9.5	(12)
26-35	13.4	(17)
36-45	20.5	(26)
45-55	18.1	(23)
56-65	19.7	(25)
66 and above	18.9	(24)
Marital status		
Never married	5.5	(07)
Married or living with partner	47.2	(60)
Separated or divorced	11.8	(15)
Widow/widower	35.4	(45)
Employment		
Artisan	19.7	(25)
Employed	24.4	(31)
Farmer	31.5	(40)
Trading /business	11.8	(15)
Unemployed or unable to work	7.1	(09)
Student	5.5	(07)
Income/week		
Less than ₦2,000	38.6	(49)
More ₦2,000	31.5	(40)
Don't know or N/A	29.9	(38)
Formal schooling		
Primary	37.8	(48)
Secondary	35.4	(45)
Tertiary	14.2	(18)
None	12.6	(16)

Spirituality and the communal crisis

The first category that came out of the findings was the belief in ‘spirituality’. The Yoruba’s believes in the dualism of life. In this sense, life events are considered as entities with spiritual and physical components, but the spiritual supersedes the physical. Spirituality as a way of life concerns itself with aligning the human will and mind with that dimension of life and the universe that is harmonious and ordered. The following extracts relates to this finding:

Ibi ati rere la da ile aiye (life is dialectical, you should expect either evil or good).Both communities were leaving harmoniously until in 1888 according to what I heard, before Satan incited bitterness in the mind of some of our leaders. To date, we are still struggling to leave above this bitterness.

It's only leaving with a clean mind that we can overcome this bitterness. **(Male community leader aged 78).**

Ope ki a to mon wipe kii se awon omo ilu gan an lo da ija sile bi ko se awon to fee jeun lara wa.(It was long before we realised that outsiders were the ones instigating some of our people to fight because of what they the outsiders stand to benefit). It is true that Esu (Devil) is not interested in peace but crisis and some of our allowed themselves to be used for self purpose. **(Widow Aged 60)**

You see there are many things in life that one must not take with levity as your enemy will destroy you before you know it. War itself is not an ordinary event and must be fought with everything. Togun togun ni o (it's with charms). In those days, our fathers relied on traditional medicine for several purposes. I remember vividly that during the 1983 crisis and that of 1997, you cannot go out anyhow expect you are well prepared either through prayers or you use charms depending on your faith. **(Male adult aged 62).**

Throughout the crisis period and during the reconciliation periods a lot of prayers and sacrifices and rituals were made for peace to reign. And we pray that the prevailing peace will forever remain. Amen. **(Focus group with adult women)**

The traditional Yoruba religion has special 'medicines' which also include those for waging wars. Medicine in the Yoruba and many African contexts implies any substance that has the ability to cause a change anywhere, anyhow. Medicine heal diseases, sickness, catch a thief, help someone to succeed in life, kill an enemy, protect one from evils and win someone's love(Keller,1978; Whyte,1988). The concept of spirituality as obtained in the Yoruba belief system could be seen in the history of the crisis as well as the post war reconstruction efforts.

Historical accounts also showed that the first crisis between both communities started between 1835 and 1849. In 1888, a Treaty of peace was signed between both communities which stipulated that the Modakekes should evacuate Ife-Land and relocate to a place between River Osun and River Oba. However, "Oba Adelekan Olubuse I., the paramount ruler of Ile-Ife in 1909 performed a sacrifice in which he took the earth of the Modakeke community and the latter mystically dispersed into places such as Ibadan, Ikire, Gbongan, Owu Iponle, and Ede. The majority moved to a place called Odeomu" (Oladoyin, 2001), (all these locations are within Osun State). This event took place before the 1888 peace Treaty was implemented.

The use of spirituality was also demonstrated during the recent the recent crisis between both communities. For instance eggs laid by local hens were used after series of incantations in burning properties where there is no petrol. Locally made charms

were conspicuously used by both sides and many medicine men and women were fully engaged in preparing different medicines. Medicines were also used as bullet proofs and even where bullets wounds, incantations are used especially with the shortage of health facilities in the localities.

In the post crisis reconstruction efforts, spirituality also played crucial roles. The state, members of the communities and other concerned Nigerians were invited to offer special prayers. During the 1997- 1998 crisis, the former Military Administrator of Osun state, Lt. Col. Anthony Obi, declared a seven-day fasting and prayer programme. Similarly, Evangelist T.O.Obadare was also invited to pray for peace and place curse on those interested in starting another round of crisis. Down to the Ooni's palace there were special prayers organised by Queen Morisola Sijuwade.(Oladoyin,2001). The Obafemi Awolowo University community was not left out as both Christians and Muslims held special prayers for the peace of the communities. Hence, religion has remained paramount in both communities' efforts in executing their plans, negotiating their interests, and the post conflict reconstruction efforts.

The age grade systems in the reconstruction efforts

The concept of forming associations is strongly entrenched in the socio-cultural structure of both communities. Power in the community is assumed to be in the hands of the king as well as the different 'egbe' (associations). Power in the Yoruba context connotes physical and spiritual meanings. Similarly, 'egbe' encapsulates age-grades, political, spiritual, as well as social groups (Adekunle, 2006).

We have no option since the end of the crisis than to look inward. Many of the promises we received by the government and other concerned Nigerians were not fulfilled. **(Male youth leader aged 34)**

'A n fi ajo ran ara wa lowo, ako si nii onigbese lara wa (We assist ourselves with joint contributions and we give grace to debtors. Motor bike riding (Okada) has been the business of most of our able bodies, since many of our husbands farm lands have been seized **(Female adult aged 51)**).

A few women participated actively in the crisis, but many women assisted in providing food for the family and pray their safety arrival. **(Male adult aged 61)**

Women in particular participated and formed several praying groups during the crisis. To date some of us still meet to pray that the peace will not disappear again. In fact, it was a terrible experience for someone like me when I heard the news of my husband's death. I ran mad for months and it took the intervention of family members and the Christ Apostolic Church in the community before I could regain back myself.

Although I have not enjoyed any other form of support from the government or NGO. I only heard that some women were given grinding machine as a form of support, but none has been given to me. I have tried several times, but pabo lo ja sii (without success). **(Widow Aged 42).**

It is interesting to note that both communities relied on the age grade system in several ways. The age grade system is common in many Yoruba land. The essence of the age grade system include socialisation, training in traditional education, creating a sense of belonging, inculcating the spirit of community cooperative work, formation of associations especially among the youths among others (Adekunle, 2006). Both communities relied on their youths including some bold children under the command of War Lords in prosecuting the war.

During the crisis periods and after, different age grades play crucial roles. The youths and the adults for instance were much involved in the fight and protection of their communities and family members. As reflected in some of the extracts, there are gender differentials in the levels of involvement, but some women also fought during the period. Those that could not go to war were providing food or praying for the safety of their loved ones and properties.

Formation of indigenous association in empowering community members

Another interesting sub-theme that emerged from the findings is the ability of the communities to be self reliant. Informal and formal associations were formed in line with existing age grade system. These associations have remained critical in the struggle between both communities. There are youth associations and progressive associations formed in the interest of the communities. The functions of these associations are also determined by the communities. Below are some extracts supporting the relevance of these associations in the continuous survival of the communities.

Some of our youths have taken to Okada (motor cycle) riding business. They use their Okada in conveying people and loads and they are paid for their services. Some of the Okadas were provided by the community in form of soft loans to willing youths so that they will not be jobless. **(Male adult aged 54).**

I lost my husband to the recent crisis. However, the community provided me with a free shop and supported me with some funds to start a business. I have been able to train two of our children to Institution of higher learning through this support. **(Widow Aged 46).**

However, limitations to what the communities alone can do in empowering their people were also observed in some the informants responses.

I have suffered so much as a widow. I lost my husband and two of my sons to the crisis. And their children are now with me. All of them have stopped schooling because of lack of fund and I can't work like before. The children have to engage in menial jobs like fetching fire woods and housemaid jobs for us to survive. **(Widow Aged 72).**

I have been struggling to get myself back. I lost all I have worked for in life to the crisis when the Mayfair shopping complex was razed. One of my uncles in Lagos stood for me and collected loan from a cooperative society to start again. Indeed I lost so many things. **(A business woman aged 51).**

The situation is a bit precarious for those that are farmers. There is still fear in the minds of some to go to their farmlands and some of us have no farm land again as they have been seized. Most times it's my wife that is now feeding the family. **(A male adult aged 60).**

There are clear indications that historical facts on the communal crisis between both communities are passed from generations to generations. There are possibilities that many of these facts would be blown out of proportion as each presenter would want to win the listener's sympathy.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The study concludes that reconstruction efforts after the recent communal clashes between both communities have been community deriving as shown by people's determination to survive in the face of limited institutional supports from the government. While the government has played critical roles in the resolving the crisis in the locality, lasting peace may become more visible if many of the affected are properly rehabilitated and reintegrated. The idea of allowing the communities to initiate and provide for their needs may at times be threatened by limited resources.

There are also outstanding issues relating to farm lands that have not been resolved. The main stay of the local economy being agriculture should be reconsidered in the search for solutions. A lasting political solution centring on the farm land disputes within the community needs to be considered. Less partisan politics should also be played in the search for solutions.

Additional findings showed that there are various local institutions empowering the communities against poverty. The government should assist these informal social network and some formal local institutions created for the peace and development of the communities.

In the final analysis, the reconstruction of destroyed buildings in lucrative areas in the communities is on-going, while many others still remained as relics of the poor relations between both communities. Many other places of abode in surrounding villages were also destroyed and no resettlement plans on ground. This is still

compounding the problem of internal displacement. Villages and farm settlements that were looted then are still in their old shadows.

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